

March 8, 2016

Planning Commission Written Comments

ALSTON AVENUE COMPACT NEIGHBORHOOD (A1500018)

Brine – This proposed compact neighborhood is also a reconfiguration of an existing compact neighborhood. It includes property on both sides of NC 147. In this case, I believe that sufficient pedestrian walkways under and over NC 147 exist so that pedestrian connectivity is not an issue.

Nevertheless, there are several unanswered questions.

1. At present the Alston Avenue Station is the Durham terminus of the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit. Do we approach the design of this compact neighborhood as if this station will always be the end-of-the-line, or do we approach it with an eye toward future extension of the rail transit system to further destinations (RTP, the airport, etc.)?
2. How to we protect and/or encourage affordable housing within this compact neighborhood?
3. This area of Durham contains heavy industry. What do we do about it? Heavy industry does not (at least in my mind) easily fit into core, support 1 or support 2 design districts. Nor does its presence necessarily contribute to walkability. Is it possible that design districts will not work in that part of this compact neighborhood containing heavy industry? (I suppose that getting rid of heavy industry is an option, but I do not consider it a good one.)

Because these questions are unanswered, I voted against this proposed compact neighborhood.

Buzby – Without an affordable housing policy in place, I have concerns with approving this compact neighborhood. I vote against. When we have an affordable housing policy in place, I will be comfortable approving this plan, this way, we can be ready to deal with the inevitable rising property values. Increased property values would be a positive outcome – but it could also push out existing citizens who may not be able to stay in their homes. Let's do this together and ensure we get the results that will benefit the community without causing any unintended consequences.

Freeman – Section 4.4 w/in proximity of my property I am not in favor but will not participate in the hearing. However for Alston ave., the proposed boundary concerns me on Morning Glory. It would be too close abut w/o a transition to my neighborhood. Ensuring affordability across the line in developing design districts should be addressed 1st. The affordable housing district needs to be defined.

Ghosh – East Durham needs this.

Gibbs – (Edgemont Comment) Voted to approve. * Historic note: area from R/R tracks/Fayett. St. to Blackwall – west to east. Angier to Taylor St. – South to North was/and is Edgemont neighborhood. Golden belt and development (hope six?) That replaced few gardens, and others were and are in Edgemont neighborhood. Edgemont has been neglected in common Lexicon and should not be denied its historical reality. Charles Gibbs. (Born in Edgemont)

Harris – Voted yes.

Huff – I urge the elected officials to vote against all of these amendments to the Future Land Use Map. We are being asked to create a group of Compact Neighborhood Tiers that will later become Design Districts each of which will have its own very specific attached zoning. We are asked to determine these boundaries without knowing what sort of configuration will exist within them. Once the Compact Neighborhood Tier is designated, the property will become more desirable and developers may seek to develop property without being subject to the Design District rules. It seems reckless to invite that. Also it is entirely possible that under the closer scrutiny occasioned by the actual establishment of real zoning there will be a need to adjust the overall boundaries we are presented with today.

If they are already set, that will be a problem. Finally, and I believe most importantly, these Compact Neighborhood Tiers and the accompanying Design Districts are supposed to provide affordable housing to those people using the transit system. Without strict enforceable regulations in place, those regulations that go with the actual creation of the Design Districts, we won't get for our community what we must as regards housing. So until these vital components are in place, I believe we should not draw the Compact Neighborhood Tier boundary lines. There are other specific problems with several of these proposed districts. The boundaries on these districts don't seem obviously problematic. I objected to approving the plan amendment for the reasons stated in the first paragraph.

Hyman – Move forward with a favorable recommendation. Motion failed.

Kenchen – No comments.

Miller – The council should vote no to this proposal to change the existing compact tier boundaries. I urge this action not because the changes proposed are bad ones, but because they are not enough. It would be better to continue to work on this case some more before bringing it to a council vote.

I approve of the changes the staff has proposed here in every case. The compact tier should not include areas like Golden Belt which are of historical importance. I believe that the district should also be shrunk further on its eastern and northern edges to make room for new low and medium density residential development in those areas. This is to be the eastern terminus of the rail line. The design district proposed for this area will dramatically change it. It is so large that it will be its own market. I am concerned that if we do not manage it very carefully, the new district will not incorporate itself into

the surrounding area, but serve only to destabilize it. As I mentioned in my broad comments about the design district planning process in case A1500014, this area has not received the planning attention it deserves. Its zoning map shows a crazy patchwork of zones that we would never allow anywhere else in town. This neglect has resulted in a regulatory environment that makes investment here an uncertain proposition. This has promoted and accelerated decline. Reversing this trend will take care and a firm hand if we are to avoid undesirable results. If we mismanage the planning of this part of Durham we will replace one bad regulatory environment with another and displacement and loss of character will be the outcome. This is an area where the creation of a design district alone is not enough. We must undertake a comprehensive rezoning of the whole area, not just the new design district. We must lay out residential areas that preserve surviving historical assets and build up a strong sense of community. We must identify logical and limited places for businesses and then provide for stable boundaries between residential and non-residential districts. We must eliminate incongruous spot zones of commercial and multifamily zoning that abound everywhere. The design district we hope to create at Alston Avenue must be part of a *gently renewed East Durham*. It cannot be at war with it. It should not destabilize it.

The solution, then, is to start small. Let's begin with a compact neighborhood tier and a design district that will not overawe and overpower this historic and important part of town. If we enjoy success in re-planning East Durham, then we may adjust the design district in the future. But for now, let's start small, but let's start now.

Riley – No comment.

Vann – Increase in rents in the area could occur, Compact Neighborhood Tier. A need to massage the boundaries a little more. Motion failed 7-6, I voted yes because this neighborhood needs growth.

Whitley – I voted to approve.

Winders – See GENERAL comments under A1500014

ALSTON AVE SPECIFICS:

- Since most of the land to be included in this area is currently designated Compact Neighborhood Tier and the area is already very urbanized, there would be little harm in adopting this amendment.
- It makes sense to add the corner lot at Fayetteville and Umstead to the Compact District, but I understand the practical problems. It is unfortunate that the property owner did not make the request earlier in the process.